

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 2040

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, JM
SUBJECT: POLITICAL OBSERVATIONS BY WESTERN KINGSTON PEACE COMMITTEE

REFERENCE: A. KINGSTON 0648 B. KINGSTON 0814

1. IN A MEETING WITH THE AMBASSADOR AND OFFICERS OF THE EMBASSY STAFF ON FEBRUARY 16, MEMBERS OF THE WESTERN KINGSTON PEACE COMMITTEE (WKPC) EXPRESSED THEIR VIEWS ON SEVERAL ISSUES INCLUDING THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF JAMAICA'S ILLS, OUT OF THE CREDIBILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT, THE OPPOSITION AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN RESPONDING TO THEIR NEEDS. THE MEETING STEMMED FROM THE AMBASSADOR'S VISIT TO THE AREA, THE FIRST SUCH VISIT BY ANY FOREIGN OFFICIAL REPRESENTATIVE.

2. THE WKPC IS COMPOSED OF THE LEADERS OF THE GANGS AFFILIATED WITH BOTH OF JAMAICA'S MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES, I.E., THE RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL PARTY (PNP) AND THE OPPOSITION JAMAICA LABOR PARTY (JLP). THESE MEN HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN A STATE OF "WAR" SINCE THE ELECTIONS IN 1967 (SEE REFTTEL A). THE WKPC IS A LOOSELY ORGANIZED ENTITY WHICH CLAIMS, PROBABLY ACCURATELY, TO BE THE ONLY VIABLE REPRESENTATIVE BODY IN THE WESTERN KINGSTON AREA (ESTIMATED POPULATION 55-80 THOUSAND). BASICALLY, THIS GROUP IS SEEKING TANGIBLE IMPROVEMENTS IN LIVING
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CONDITIONS IN THE AREA.

3. DURING THE MEETING, THE DELEGATES COMMENTED CYNICALLY ON THE PERFORMANCE OF JAMAICAN POLITICIANS AND THE GOVERNMENT. FIRST, WHILE THESE GHETTO DWELLERS HAVE SPOKEN WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITON, THEIR RESPECTIVE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND

OTHERS, THEY CLAIM THAT THESE TALKS HAVE NOT BEEN FOLLOWED UP. ACCORDING TO THE DELEGATES, EACH PROMISE MADE BY JAMAICAN LEADERS, INCLUDING THAT OF OPPOSITION LEADER EDWARD SEAGA TO DONATE HALF HIS CONSTITUTIONAL SALARY (J\$5,000) TO THE COMMITTEE, HAS PROVEN HOLLOW. SIMILARLY, THE GROUP IS SUSPICIOUS OF THE RECOVERED J\$273 THOUSAND RETURNED TO JAMAICA BY FIDEL CASTRO FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A CULTURAL TRAINING CENTER (SEE REFTEL B,) ARGUING THAT IT WILL COST MUCH MORE THAN THAT TO BUILD, AND THAT THOSE WHO MAY RECEIVE AID AND TRAINING AT SUCH A CENTER WOULD STILL END UP UNEMPLOYED. MOREOVER, THEY DO NOT SEE A NEED FOR THE CENTER AND ARE ANGRY THAT THEY WERE NOT CONSULTED ON HOW THESE FUNDS COULD BE USED.

4. THE COMMITTEE HAS DESPAIRED OF RECEIVING ASSISTANCE FROM ANY OFFICIAL JAMAICAN ORGANIZATION AND DEMONSTRATED DISTRUST OF ALL EXISTING INSTITUTIONS. THE DELEGATES HINTED AT FURTHER VIOLENCE, BUT NOT AIMED AT EACH OTHER, OR A "RETURN TO THIEVERY" IN THE ABSENCE OF TANGIBLE RESULTS TO THEIR PEACE INITIATIVES. ON A POSITIVE NOTE, THE DELEGATION CLAIMED TO HAVE RECEIVED SOME BENEFITS FROM "INDIVIDUALS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR".

5. DURING THE MEETING, THE WKPC REPRESENTATIVES OCCASIONALLY EXPRESSED HOSTILITY TOWARD THE ".*;3 " IN CONFIDENTIAL

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JAMAICA, OR THOSE IN POSITIONS OF WEALTH AND INFLUENCE, AND AT THE "CORRUPT" POLICE FORCE. THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS LEFT A STRONG IMPRESSION OF SOLIDARITY WITHIN THEIR NEWLY-FORMED ALLIANCE.

6. THE COMMITTEE IDENTIFIED FOOD, ESPECIALLY FOR THE OLD AND VERY YOUNG, AS THE AREA'S MOST URGENT NEED. THE COMMITTEE WOULD LIKE TO SET UP A "NUTRITION CENTER" AND MANAGE THE DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD ALONG P.L. 480 TITLE II LINES. THE COMMITTEE WAS AWARE OF AND PLEASED WITH A TITLE II ACTIVITY WHICH WAS TERMINATED SOME THREE YEARS AGO. THE COMMITTEE IDENTIFIED EQUIPMENT NEEDS FOR PROJECTS THEY HAVE DEVELOPED, SOME OF WHICH ARE BEING IMPLEMENTED -- E.G., STOVE, TOOLS, REFRIGERATOR.

7. COMMENT: WE WERE IMPRESSED WITH THE VIGOR, DETERMINATION, COMMITMENT AND UNITY OF THIS GROUP. THEY FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT THEIR SELF-HELP EFFORTS ARE CRITICAL TO CHANGING THEIR LIVES, IFZAT POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CRITERIA ARE DAMAGING TO THEIR WELFARE AND THAT THE GOJ AND POLITICIANS IN GENERAL WILL NOT BE USEFUL IN THEIR SITUATION. WE ARE CONVINCED THAT THE INTEREST OF THE

WKPC OFFERS US AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO BE HELPFUL IN
A SERIOUSLY DISTRESSED URBAN AREA AND TO DEMONSTRATE OUR
CONCERN FOR THE "POOREST OF THE POOR" IN JAMAICA AND
THAT WE MUST, THEREFORE, RESPOND BOTH PROMPTLY AND
MEANINGFULLY. THUS, WE ARE PREPARING PLANS AND PROPOSALS
REGARDING THIS IMPRESSIVE AND SIGNIFICANT SELF-HELP
INITIATIVE WHICH WE WILL TRANSMIT BY SEPTTEL.
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